

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

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SUBJECT: PROPOSED CONFERENCE IN ITALY ON DRUG ABUSE

REF: STATE 254205, DEC 1974

1. THERE IS GROWING PUBLIC AWARENESS IN ITALY THAT THE UBIQUITY OF THE PROBLEM OF DRUG ABUSE NOW EMBRACES THIS PENINSULA. PROMINENT AND REGULAR MEDIA COVERAGE OF NARCOTICS SEIZURES, ARRESTS AND NARCOTICS-RELATED CRIME AND DEATH SERVES TO REINFORCE THE GROWING SENSE OF THREAT. CLEARLY OUR OWN NARCOTICS CONTROL GOALS IN ITALY ARE BETTER SERVED TO THE EXTENT THAT AN INFORMED CONSITUENCY DEVELOPS HERE FOR ACTIVE PROGRAMS TO COMBAT DURG ABUSE ON ITS SEVERAL LEVELS, PREVENTION, ENFORCEMENT AND REHABILITATION. ALTHOUGH ITALIAN ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS ARE RELATIVELY EFFECTIVE, THERE HAS HERETOFORE BEEN LITTLE GOVERNMENT EFFORT TOWARD DEALING WITH THE OTHER ASPECTS OF DRUG ABUSE. A NEW DRUG LAW NOW BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT AND LIKELY TO BE APPROVED, WHILE INTRODUCING SOME ANOMALY INTO THE ENFORCEMENT EFFORT (PARTICULARLY IN THE ATTEMPT TO DECRIMINALIZE USE), MOVES TOWARD PROVIDING SOME INFRASTRUCTURE IN PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION.

2. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THE TIME IS RIGHT IN TERMS OF OUR NARCOTICS CONTROL PURPOSES TO MIDWIFE A MAJOR CONFERENCE IN

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ITALY ON DRUG ABUSE. SUCH A CONFERENCE WOULD IN OUR VIEW

CLEARLY MEET THE CRITERIA FOR US COOPERATION/ASSISTANCE AS OUTLINED REFTEL. APART FROM THE OBVIOUS SUBSTANTIVE BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM SUCH A CONFERENCE; REINFORCING OR IN MOST CASES OPENING A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AMERICAN EXPERTS AND THEIR ITALIAN COUNTERPARTS, THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS BETWEEN A COUNTRY WITH MORE EXPERIENCE THAN MOST IN DEALING WITH THE PROBLEMS (THE US) AND A COUNTRY WITH LESS EXPERIENCE THAN MOST (ITALY), ETC., THERE ARE COLLATERAL BENEFITS THAT WOULD ACCRUE OF PERHAPS EVEN GREATER IMPORTANCE. THE CONFERENCE IF IT CAN BE ORGANIZED FOR THE SPRING OF 1976 WOULD BE UNIQUELY TIMELY IN SEVERAL RESPECTS. IT WOULD COME AT A TIME WHEN THE NEW NARCOTICS LAW IS BEING SHAKEN DOWN. THE EMERGING NEW BUREAUCRACY (AND THE OLD LARGELY INACTIVE AND INVISIBLE ONE) WOULD BE PROJECTED IN THE EXPECTED MEDIA COVERAGE AND GAIN THE PRESTIGE AND EXPOSURE NECESSARY TO STRENGTHEN THEIR VOICE IN DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL PROGRAMS. AMONG THEM WE COULD EXPECT THAT THERE WOULD DEVELOP A LARGER SET OF SYMPATHETIC INTERLOCUTORS FOR OUR OWN PROGRAMS.

3. THE SPRING TIMING OF THE CONFERENCE, AND ITS GENERALLY NON-CONTROVERSIAL PURPOSES IN AN AREA OF GROWING PUBLIC CONCERN WOULD, WE BELIEVE, SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTE TO OUR POLITICAL PURPOSES IN ITALY AS WELL. WE WOULD HOPE THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF ITALY WOULD ACTIVELY INVOLVE ITSELF IN SPONSORING THE CONFERENCE AND THAT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP WOULD ASSOCIATE ITSELF WITH IT, PREEMPTING AN IMPORTANT SOCIAL ISSUE THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE GRIST FOR THE MILLS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF ITALY.

4. THE FORM THAT THE CONFERENCE COULD TAKE AND THE DETAILS OF ITS SUBSTANCE ARE OF COURSE BEYOND THE COMPETENCE OF THIS EMBASSY TO DEVISE. AN ILLUSTRATIVE MODEL HOWEVER MAY BE FOUND IN THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE ON THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF DRUG DEPENDENCE PLANNED FOR HAMBURG, GERMANY, FROM JUNE 28 TO JULY 2, 1976. NATURALLY, UNTIL THE CONCEPT OF THIS CONFERENCE RECEIVES DEPARTMENT APPROVAL WE CANNOT MAKE AN INITIAL APPROACH TO THE GOI. WE FEEL CONFIDENT HOWEVER THAT THERE WILL BE SIGNIFICANT INTEREST, BUT CANNOT PREDICT AT THIS POINT THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE GOI WILL BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE RESOURCES. WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S APPROVAL, HOWEVER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WE WOULD PROPOSE THAT THE FIRST STEP HERE BE TO CONTACT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT TO OBTAIN A COMMITMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO BE FLESHED OUT LATER. THE "LATER" WE FORESEE AS THE IDENTIFICATION OF AN ITALIAN ORGANIZER (PRESUMABLY BUT NOT NECESSARILY FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH) AND OF AN AMERICAN ORGANIZER (POSSIBLY AT NIDA) WHO WOULD COORDINATE THE ORGANIZATION AND PROGRAM OF THE CONFERENCE AND BEGIN TO INVITE PARTICIPANTS. ASSUMING THAT THE ITALIANS WOULD PROVIDE A CON-

REFERENCE SITE, THE US FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION WOULD BE PRIMARILY
IN TERMS OF TRAVEL AND PER DIEM COSTS, INCLUDING THE SUPPORT
OF TRAVEL BY PERSONS REPRESENTING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES
IN THE AREA OF DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION.

5. THE EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE AN EARLY DECISION SO THAT
CONTACTS WITH THE APPROPRIATE MEMBERS OF THE GOI CAN SOON
TAKE PLACE. VOLPE

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